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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MALIKI'S CHOSEN GOVERNORS IMPRESS EARLY

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1259

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 1238

[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 1203

[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 1191

[1](#)E. BAGHDAD 1167

[1](#)F. BASRAH 22

[1](#)G. HILLAH 34

[1](#)H. HILLAH 32

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Through careful managing of the post-provincial election coalition-building process, eight of the ten Shi'a-majority provinces have new governors approved by Prime Minister Maliki; six of those represent the Da'wa Central wing of his State of Law coalition. Early May meetings between Senior Advisor Gordon Gray and new governors in Basra, Hillah, and Diwaniyah indicate that the new leadership shares a pragmatic, moderate approach. Most are eager to work with our Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), in no small part because they are under pressure to deliver tangible results in advance of the national elections. Maliki will still face challenges in keeping his big-tent coalition together, as evidenced by the defection of State of Law members who were elected to the governorships of Wasit and Muthanna provinces with the help of the rival Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). The USG will face its own challenge in managing the expectations of provincial governments in a time of declining resources. End summary.

State of Play

[1](#)2. (C) After the dust storms kicked up by post-election Provincial Council (PC) coalition-building finally settled, the Prime Minister found himself in a relatively strong position in the ten Shi'a-majority provinces in which State of Law won the most seats -- though not perhaps as strong as he had hoped. New governors from Maliki's Da'wa Central wing were appointed in Baghdad, Basra, Karbala, Diwaniyah, Maysan, and Dhi Qar provinces. Adnan al-Zurfi, a Maliki confidante, former governor (2003-04), and Ministry of Interior deputy for intelligence, returned to the governor's seat in Najaf on his Loyalty to Najaf ticket (ref E). An unknown independent was tapped by State of Law for the governorship in Babil (ref G). In two provinces, surprise defections to an ISCI-led bloc by State of Law members -- incumbent Governor Latif Hamed al-Turfa (from State of Law independents) in Wasit and Ibrahim Salman al-Mayali (from Da'wa Central) in Muthanna -- led to those men being appointed governor of their respective provinces. Maliki loyalists were relegated to the minority on the PC in each case (refs C, H).

Concessions

¶3. (C) In a few cases, PC Chairmanships and First Deputy Governor slots were reserved for the other two branches of State of Law -- Da'wa Tanzim and Independents -- but they are strikingly absent from the five executive positions in most provinces. Several sources, including within the Prime Minister's office, indicated that Maliki was uncomfortable with many Da'wa Tanzim leaders due to their close Iranian ties, and with Independents due to competing agendas. Our meetings with leaders that were chosen from these wings have not raised red flags, however; in Basra, incoming PC Chairman Jabar Amin (Da'wa Tanzim) expressed in his meeting with Gray the same governing goals, religious moderation and spirit of cooperation shown by Da'wa Central leaders.

¶4. (C) Among parties outside State of Law, Dr. Ja'afari's National Reform Trend and the Sadrists figure most prominently in the Da'wa-led provincial governments. National Reform Trend snagged the PC Chairmanship in Dhi Qar and lesser executive slots (such as Deputy Governor, Deputy PC Chair, and Second Deputy Governor) in several other QPC Chair, and Second Deputy Governor) in several other provinces. The Sadrists gained the PC Chairmanship in Babil and secondary executive positions in Baghdad, Basra, Najaf, Dhi Qar, and Diwaniyah. Notably, State of Law reserved secondary executive positions for the Sadrists and ISCI in Basra, despite having an outright majority on the PC. Governor Chiltag Abud (Da'wa Central) spoke to Gray cheerfully about how offering this olive branch represents the spirit of reconciliation in Basra, but also more or less conceded that Maliki's office forced the arrangement on them. Key committee chairmanships, which are more coveted than deputy executive positions, are still in the process of negotiations in most provinces -- but some concessions are being made on that front also.

Old New Blood

¶5. (C) The new State of Law governing teams include many faces new to us, but who are long-time Da'wa members who built their credentials as exiles during the Saddam era. Dhi Qar Governor Talib Hassan is believed to be originally from Nasiriyah but had been working for years as a public-relations manager for Maliki in Baghdad. Talib was expelled from Iraq in the 1970s by the Ba'athists for religious activities. Basra Governor Chiltag Abud, a university professor, while apparently not a close Maliki confidante, has been a Da'wa member since the 1970s. These and others new governors -- including Amal al-din al-Hir in Karbala and Salim Hussein Alwan in Diwaniyah -- are over 50 years old and were chosen in no small part due to party loyalty (ref A). Adnan al-Zurfi, while running on his own party ticket, is widely considered to be one of Maliki's go-to senior officials in the Interior Ministry.

¶6. (C) While many of the old-line Da'wa governors are quite religious in private and in public, they are careful to sound and dress like pro-western technocrats who will not be unduly influenced by their neighbor to the east. Certainly no one will mistake them for their ISCI/Badr predecessors. In their meetings with Gray, Governor Abud and Governor Alwan expressed the same themes: the need to deliver services (electricity, water, sewage), provide security, and foster respect for the rule of law. Each was eager to dispense with pleasantries and learn what the PRT can provide them and how quickly we can do it. Alwan, upon hearing that an irrigation project carried out by another PRT might be replicable in rural Diwaniyah said, "Let's do it now. Even if there are mistakes. I don't need to study the details." Both also made a point to emphasize how well they can cooperate with other parties in the province, ranging from the Sadrists to secular and tribal leaders.

New New Blood

¶7. (C) Truly new Da'wa-appointed faces are few and far between, and have been chosen for very specific reasons. The new governor in Babil, Salman Taha Nassir al-Zargani, is a former provincial director of sewage who did not run for a council seat and has no known Da'wa affiliation. The relative weakness of Da'wa, with a slim plurality on the Babil PC, forced it to concede all the major executive slots in the province to non-Da'wa members (ref H). In his meeting with Gray, Salman sounded like a plausibly competent technocrat but was the least confident of the new governors, emphasizing his need to build alliances in order to meet the province's needs. Salman will be kept on a tight leash by Maliki's representative in Babil, Abu Ahmed al-Basri, who sounded non-committal about the new governor in his meeting with Gray. No Da'wa members under the age of 40 were appointed to executive slots above the rank of Deputy Provincial Council Chairman. In contrast, several of the top Sadrist and National Reform Trend elected leaders, including both new PC Chairmen, are in their 30s.

Maliki's Challenge: Managing the Big Tent

¶8. (C) As Maliki's big tent further expands in anticipation of building a new coalition for the national elections, he will have difficulty keeping in line even his old friends. In Wasit, Governor Latif, upon hearing that he was no longer QIn Wasit, Governor Latif, upon hearing that he was no longer Maliki's choice to continue as governor, flipped sides and brought with him the other State of Law Independents and three of four Da'wa Tanzim PC members. They are now governing the province in a truly bizarre new coalition alongside ISCI and the Sadrists. In Muthanna, Da'wa Central member Ibrahim Salman, miffed that he was passed over for the top slot, crossed over to arch-rival ISCI/Badr to become governor. Rumblings of other prospective switches were heard but were ultimately prevented in several other provinces, including Babil (where one Da'wa member proposed himself for governor at a PC meeting), Basra (where Independents were wavering) and Najaf.

¶9. (C) Provincial partners from other parties will also be difficult to manage. In Diwaniyah Province, the Da'wa Central-affiliated chairman of the Agriculture Committee noted that only in his province did Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya party receive an executive slot, despite aligning with Maliki's party in five provinces. "They aren't happy about that," he said. (Iraqiya would have had a second in Wasit -- a point bitterly noted to poloff by an Iraqiya-affiliated Wasit PC member who recently filed a lawsuit against Governor Latif, claiming that he does not meet the minimum educational qualifications for the position). Provincial budgets for 2009 were already fully committed -- or over-committed -- by the outgoing PC in most provinces by the end of January, which will make it difficult for the new governing teams to fulfill their promises and mend fences with those who expected more (ref G).

Comment: Our Challenge -- Managing Expectations

¶10. (C) Given 40 to 45 percent provincial budget cuts, no budget flexibility, and the pressure to deliver before national elections, the new Maliki-affiliated governing teams are naturally looking to the PRTs and the USG writ large for any additional assistance, especially tangible deliverables. Upon hearing that PRT Basra would soon begin work on two sewage projects in the city, each valued at \$10 million, Governor Abud and PC Chairman Amin naturally treated us like kings. (They were less than enthused about a proposal for GOI-USG cost-sharing on a water-treatment project.) Such projects are an exception these days and future disappointment with the range of USG development assistance is inevitable. But even taking into account the

friendliness by necessity, the early technocratic approach taken by new Da'wa-led governing teams in most southern provinces is a marked improvement over their predecessors' attitudes. This is especially true in the "Badr Belt" -- Hillah, Diwaniyah, and Dhi Qar -- where the previous provincial governments often exhibited a siege mentality in their approach to the USG, and complete incompetence in service delivery. End comment.

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